

The Lion

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Unofficial Newsletter for Members Only of St. Mark's Parish, Denver, Colorado

ADVENT SUNDAY

An Essay by SubDeacon James Tochihara
St. Mark's Church, Denver

From the Twenty-first Chapter of St. Matthew: Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

ADVENT is a time of purification. We need to wash the inside of our hearts, to clean out our minds of all the dirt and distractions that have gotten stuck inside them. Purification is like a tune-up for the soul that restores our true self to its top working order. Prayer, fasting, and giving alms are cleansing and purifying for the soul, as is the sacrament of confession, where God washes away our sins. Obviously, these are just empty practices without the proper spirit and understanding. If we want to see what purification is all about, Jesus himself gives us the perfect model of purification in the Gospel today.

The Gospel portrays his entrance into Jerusalem, where he goes to die. To accomplish this work, he must purify himself utterly. Of course, he is already clean and without sin, but he shows us his purification in order to fulfill all righteousness. This echoes his earlier purifications in the desert, when he allowed Satan to tempt him, and when he commanded John to baptize him. These purifications washed away his youth and revealed a prophet of wisdom and healing. His purification in the Gospel today will eventually reveal even greater glory, but by the end of it, he is a man without any emotional crutches, weaknesses, or excuses. When he catches the first glimpse of Jerusalem, he prophesies the destruction

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of the city and weeps for the people. He purifies himself of any natural pride in his nation. When he rides not upon a majestic white stallion, but upon a she-donkey, he purifies his attachment to his own kingship and authority and power.

Finally, he chases the money changers out of the temple. With this one act, he purifies his entire humanity, socially, politically, and religiously. He has the support of the crowds behind him, and yet he uses it to anger the small businessmen, the common people, the political parties of Sadducees and Pharisees, and the court of King Herod. I'm sure that the Roman Imperial occupation doesn't appreciate it, and even the zealots, who are violent rebels, think it wrong to harass Jewish businessmen instead of murdering Roman soldiers. Jesus of Nazareth is no longer, and never was, a part of any controversy or cause but his own. The only group with which he might have had a loose connection, the Essenes, were essentially monastic--devoted to purifying themselves for the coming of the Messiah.



In the temple, he is a clean offering before God, a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice, a full, perfect and sufficient oblation and satisfaction. In his purity, the people in the street recognized him. They cried out, Hosanna to the son of David, the great king. Here is the true Lion of Judah, the Messiah (or Christ--both words mean "the anointed one"). In those days, people used different kinds of soap and water to clean themselves, but often they used olive oil for the soap. Anointing a king was a way of ritually cleansing him for his duties, because only the clean and pure of heart can exercise true authority and obtain God's blessings. One of the many meanings of Christ, then, could be "the Clean One", or "the Purified One". In the word "Christ" we can discover meanings such as, He-who-is-free-of-the-slavery-of-worldly-attachment, or He-who-knows-his-true-self. But we know that his purification will reveal the King of kings, the Mediator between God and man, who will unite all of Heaven and earth.

And here also, is the true High Priest. While he shows us how he purifies his own humanity, the very same actions are purifying us. As he rides the she-donkey, plodding along, he is called a prophet, and the son of David. It is the nature of human vanity, so in need of purification, that we want to see our own willfulness exalted, but he does not ride in as the status-conscious rich man,

nor as the swaggering or vulgar common man; not as the political partisan, nor as the self-righteous aristocrat; not as the rebel, nor as the policeman. Call out Hosanna to him, and you exalt the humble sage and the modest scholar, the faithful monk and the single-minded craftsman, the obedient son and the captain who runs ahead of his men into battle. Every time you worship him or pray to him, he is purifying you.

Our Blessed Mother has received his purification. In a stroke, Gabriel the Archangel calls her out of all polite and respectable society to have a child out of wedlock, and to be shunned by her kinfolk. At least Joseph wants to do just that, when he finds out she's pregnant. And yet, despite knowing that a harsh purification is in store, she accepts the call on the very spot. She travels to Bethlehem, the house of David, and must stay in a cave that serves as a stable. She is purified of any arrogance or vanity in being the mother of the King of Judah and Israel. She learns the true meaning of royalty as she gives birth upon the hay to the King of the Universe. And then, she flees into Egypt, and she is purified of all emotional attachment to familiar objects and domestic comforts. Herod pursues her, and she is purified of any naive trust in the authority of men. Like King David the great psalmist, she delights not in any man's legs nor the strength of horses, but she trusts in God. Man is like the grass--the wind passes over him, and he vanishes. To receive something pure, she must be purified. She is like the peak of Mount Sinai receiving the presence of God--the first place to be touched, she must be the first place purified for the sake of the Messiah.

Like Mary, John the Baptist accepted a harsh purification out in the desert. He left his home, the comfortable life of a priest's son, and lived in solitude in the desert, eating locusts and honey. In the end, he learned that he was a prophet, the herald and forerunner of the Son of God. In both cases, Mary's and John's, God blesses their purification with an individualized mission, a special plan for each of them that comes from his divine Providence.

We can receive the same blessing, as anyone can. If we purify ourselves, life will have new energy and power, the energy and power of the Holy Ghost. God has given each of us a secret treasure in our hearts. It is the priceless, flawless pearl of our own mysterious self. We will never know it until we purify ourselves, until we leave our friends and families and possessions and forget our struggles to change them, and forget our refusal to let anyone change us. We purify our hearts now, in Advent, praying, fasting, and giving alms. God is expecting all of us to do something with this priceless treasure that he has given to each of us. When we die, he will ask us what we did with his borrowed gifts.

Purification is a time of pulling away from the world and forgetting ourselves. We must leave our mother and father. That's not "dishonor our mother and father," but leave. We must leave our father and mother unburied. Let the dead bury the dead. We must leave our families, our villages, and our lands. We must leave our spouses and our homes. Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. We must deny ourselves and take up our cross. Whoever holds onto his life shall lose it, and whoever loses himself for Jesus' sake shall find his true self. How can we purify ourselves, how do we lose ourselves for Jesus' sake? Should we abandon our families and quit our jobs?

Fortunately, we have a door to another world, right here. In this place, we kiss icons of the saints, light candles, and make the sign of the cross: all of these things purify our minds and bodies of worldly concerns. Mass and Vespers takes us out of the ordinary world with sitting, kneeling, singing, chanting and praying. What a wonderful, strange little world this is, where men wear strange clothes and gather around an odd marble table, while others sing sounds that aren't heard in the streets. We symbolically cleanse ourselves with holy water when we enter, and at that moment we should forget our lives completely. We are in a holy place--as holy as Mt. Sinai, the Jordan River, Galilee, and Golgotha, because we approach Heaven itself. Do not worry, and do not be anxious. Let the incense purify all the bodies and objects here. Let the bells cleanse the air and its vibrations with its pure tone. Lose yourself.

Every period of purification is only a prelude to an outpouring of God's grace. God's light can't help but shine out of those who are clean. And here today, we are rewarded with knowledge of our true self and admittance into the Heavenly Feast of our God, to eat his Body and drink his Blood. The Body and Blood of Jesus cleanse us body and soul, and our old worldly selves are no more. At that moment, there will only be Jesus--everywhere, everyone, and everything. We become a part of his conquering and victorious Body. As our Lord said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. And our parents, spouses, and children, our lands, and our wealth are all returned to us, and multiplied as they were for Job. When the last candle is extinguished and we leave the church, we go forth with the fire of John the Baptist and the silence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in all the power of our true selves, to give glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. ♣

DECEMBER ANNO DOMINI 2003
ST. MARK'S PARISH, DENVER, COLORADO

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	
31 November ADVENT SUNDAY 7:30 Matins (plainsong, St. Dunstan's Psalter) 8:00 Low Mass, Sermon 9:00 Church School 10:00 Choral Mass Social hour after Mass 4:00 PM Evensong	1 St. Andrew the Apostle 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 12 Noon Mass 4:00 Evensong	2 St. Bibiana, VM 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 12 Noon Mass 4:00 Evensong	3 Advent Feria 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 12 Noon Mass 4:00 Evensong	4 St. Peter Chrysologus of Ravenna 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 4:00 Evensong	5 St. Sabas, Ab 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 4:00 Evensong	6 St. Nicholas of Myra, Bp 8:30 Matins 9:00 Latin Mass 10 Catechism 4:00 Evensong	
7 ADVENT II 7:30 Matins (plainsong, St. Dunstan's) 8:00 Low Mass, Sermon 9:00 Church School 10:00 Choral Mass CHOIR Appreciation 11:30 Social hour 4:00 PM Evensong	8 Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Evensong St. James' 7:30 PM & Ven. Bede study	9 Of the Octave Evensong St. Columba 6 PM Evensong St. James' 7:30 PM & Ven. Bede study	10 Of the Octave 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 12 Noon Mass of the Holy Angels 4:00 Evensong	11 Of the Octave 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 4:00 Evensong	12 Of the Octave 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 4:00 Evensong	13 St. Lucy, VM 8:30 Matins 9:00 Latin Mass 10 Catechism 4:00 Evensong	
14 ADVENT III 7:30 Matins (plainsong, St. Dunstan's Psalter) 8:00 Low Mass, Sermon 9:00 Church School 10:00 Choral Mass Church Women's Bake Sale 4:00 PM Evensong	15 Octave of the Conception of the BVM Evensong St. Columba 6 PM Evensong St. James' 7:30 PM & Ven. Bede study	16 Advent Feria Evensong St. Columba 6 PM Evensong St. James' 7:30 PM & Ven. Bede study	17 Ember Wednesday 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 12 Noon Mass 4:00 Evensong	18 Advent Feria 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 4:00 Evensong	19 Ember Friday 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 4:00 Evensong	20 Ember Saturday 8:30 Matins 9:00 Latin Mass 10 Catechism 4:00 Evensong	
21 ADVENT IV 7:30 Matins (plainsong, St. Dunstan's Psalter) 8:00 Low Mass, Sermon 9:00 Church School 10:00 Choral Mass Social hour after Mass 4:00 PM Evensong	22 St. Thomas Apostle	23 Advent Feria	24 CHRISTMAS EVE 9:00 AM Matins 4 PM Evensong 5 PM Vigil Mass of the Nativity 10:30 Lessons & Carols 11 PM Midnight Mass of the Nativity	25 NATIVITY OF OUR LORD 9:30 AM Matins 10 AM Mass of the Nativity 4 PM Evensong	26 St. Stephen Proto-Martyr 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 4:00 Evensong	27 St. John Evangelist 8:30 Matins 9:00 Latin Mass 4:00 Evensong	
28 HOLY INNOCENTS 7:30 Matins (plainsong, St. Dunstan's Psalter) 8:00 Low Mass, Sermon 9:00 Church School 10:00 Choral Mass Social hour after Mass 4:00 PM Evensong	29 Nativity Octave	30 Nativity Octave	31 St. Sylvester, Pope & Confessor 7:00 Matins 7:30 Mass 12 Noon Mass 4:00 Evensong	<p>The St. Mark's Bookstore offers many crosses, and spiritual and historical books, as well as Russian dolls and collectables, suitable for the faithful and not generally available elsewhere.</p> <p>Lancelot Andrewes Press offers <i>St. Dunstan's Plainsong Psalter</i>, the best in English, for \$30 plus free shipping.</p> <p>The Four volume <i>Commentary on the Psalms</i> by Neale & Littledale is back in print for \$175 and free shipping for December.</p> <p>LA Press, PO BOX 460186, Glendale, CO 80246</p>			



The colour Guard prepare to leave with the Colours following the Mass and Remembrance Service. Our thanks to the Choir who prepared especially for this day. December 14 has been declared "Choir Day" by Metropolitan Philip in recognition of all the choirs of the Archdiocese and their service in the Divine Liturgy. St. Mark's will focus the choral appreciation on 7 December as the Church Women have an event on 14 December. Contributions to the St. Cecilia Guild are welcome.



At right some of the dedicated scholars who remained after Evensong on 29 November. Thanks to Mr. Hartman and all for a very edifying "Angels and Archangels" Day. Above, Carol (altar flower chair) and Ken McCabe; below the Nov. Church Women's fund raiser luncheon; below right a gathering including Presbytera Sara Dinkler, the Hartmans, and others following the Thanksgiving Day Evensong at St. Mark's. Our thanks to all who participated, prepared, and cleared tables afterward.



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6 December 2003 St. Nicholas of Myra (Santa Claus)

Dear St. Mark's Faithful:

Thank you for your loyal support and prayers through the Year of Grace 2003. It has been a generally positive year in which the Archdiocese got limited autonomy in self government. Our parochial mission, St. Columba, built a new church on an excellent site just East of Lafayette, Colorado. Several men were elevated to serve the Liturgy as Acolytes, Readers, Sub-Deacons. Mary Sullivan Coit was made an "Archdiocesan Iconographer" and Benjamin Andersen an "Archdiocesan Seminarian" with a scholarship to St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York. We finally unpacked the new marble Altar and completely renovated the Sanctuary of the Church. Holy Relicks of St. Alban and St. Vincent and St. Raphael the Bishop were brought by His Grace, Bishop Basil and suitable icon reliquaries prepared through the generous donations of many believers. Everyone seems pleased with the result. Fr. John was granted the honorific of "Archpriest" by His Grace, Bishop Basil, during a parochial visit in June.

Matushka Deborah and many volunteers have served countless Social Hours and luncheons making good use of our parish hall and piazza San Marco. Many have made good use of our excellent Orthodox Bookstore adding books and icons and crosses and holy medals to their lives in Christ. Participation in the week day Matins and Masses and Evensong has increased and we appreciate all who are learning and serving at these liturgies.

St. Dunstan's Plainsong Psalter was brought into print through the help of many parishioners in proof texting and chanting the drafts. The Psalter has been bought by Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran parishes from New Zealand to the Swiss Alps. Our web site draws over 300 visitors a day and over 1,000 copies of the current LION newsletter are downloaded each month. New members and catechumens have contributed much by serving in the Choir and the Church School program. Fund raisers by the Church Women and SOYO Youth were well supported by all. Many of you support the monthly appeals for monastics, orphans, missions, and the thousands of dollars sent out from St. Mark's do many good works in many places.

We have been blessed by participation in the Benedictine Oblate program for men and women and God has blessed us with vocations of all ages to prayer and liturgical service.

Please take time to fill out a Pledge Card for the life and witness of St. Mark's Parish for the Year of Grace 2004. May God the Holy and Undivided Trinity continue his blessings and deliver us and our Nation from all evils.

Yours in Christ, Father John Connely & the Vestry

The Way Forward for Members Only of St. Mark's Parish

Learn and Pray the Psalter and the Mass

IT is evident that both the laity and the clergy must acquire the skills of worship in order to reap the benefits of an interior spiritual life. This is what Fr. Gabriel Bunge, OSB, and others call the *praxis* of a life of prayer. Moreover, to secure the peace we need to pursue a life of prayer, the parishes in which we worship must be well ordered sanctuaries of excellent corporate *praxis*, which is liturgy: the Mass, and the Hours (Matins, Lauds, Vespers, Compline) adapted for parochial use.

For several years we have observed the beginning, and, too often, the close, of Western Rite missions and parochial work. We salvaged the altar from Holy Incarnation in Detroit days before the church was sold. We have seen numerous WR missions begun, bungled, abandoned, and closed, or co-opted as Eastern rite shops -usually accompanied by posturings about alleged spiritual defects in the "western" usages.

We have also seen WR missions begun and continued with bravery in the face of many obstacles. What the bungled as well as the brave WR efforts have in common is that the Clergy bear most of the burden, in practice, for failures or successes.

It is fair to observe that not many of the Clergy have been prepared with the skills and resources needed to found and grow a Western Rite parish. A few, like the late Archpriest Patrick McCauley, have learned essential skills and applied those skills and personal energy and vision to accomplish great things. Had he lived, it is probable that Fr. Patrick would have acquired more skills, more knowledge, and motivated thousands of people to build and strengthen the Western Rite witness in the Church.

The Western Rite does not have a natural ethnic identity to pull it together. The WR does not really draw any strength from nostalgia for a faded

Victorian or Edwardian past. The young don't do nostalgia, and the elders, given their spiritual experience, desire a vital and authentic tradition. Neither young nor old want a museum church of liturgical specimens preserved in moth balls.

The only potential of the Western Rite that can motivate us, both young and old, is to recover the holy and vital *praxis* of the Orthodox Latin West, which in its day defied heretics, infidels, princes, barbarians, and fortified a great Christian civilization blessed by God with a multitude of Saints.

The faithful themselves, the laity, boys and girls, and men and women, must become the devout core of the Western Rite movement.

Learn and pray the Psalter so often that the sacred texts and the simple melodies become 'second nature' and furnish the heart with a vast and rich interior spiritual life. For this everyone needs a *Psalter*, *St. Dunstan's Plainsong Psalter* if reciting in English.

Learn and pray the Mass and the lessons and the chants of the Kyrial and Gradual so that the sacred Ministers can attend to their prayers, and their readings, and their ritual actions, knowing that the *liturgos*, the work of the people of God, is manifested in the fullness of liturgy. For this everyone needs a *Kyrial*, a *Gradual*, a *Missal* with the sacred texts, and the skills to read and sing the same.

Worship skills come by sheer quantity of experience with a desire to make an acceptable offering to God. Quality follows quantity, as *theoria* follows *praxis* and spiritual wisdom follows the letter of sacred text. The laity and minor orders will do this and do it well (once they have the right books and skills) and everyone, especially the parish Priest, *Deo volente*, will be thankful. §

Fr. JCC

THE Clergy can build an excellent parochial liturgical *praxis* only with committed helpers: The Deacons, SubDeacons, Readers, Acolytes, Schola Cantorum, the worshipping faithful, who together produce the liturgies. The worship and training offered at Regional meetings and the Priests' retreat are a powerful and needed boost for the clergy. However, there are many distractions in Priests' lives including:
1) Many of our Priests work a secular job in addition to their church 'job.'
2) Much of the Priests' parochial work is putting out fires caused by disorders of appetites and wills amongst the faithful... the very folk who, if they had devout *praxis*, and the interior spiritual resources, would better be working on their own repentance.
3) Our Priests are expected to devote attention to budgets, programs, ministries, administrations... and the reports generated regarding all those... and raise money for all those budgets and programs and ministries and reports.
4) When the clergy actually do get time off they understandably flee from the church stuff for needed R & R... necessary, and yet not opportune for building liturgical skills.

Hence, the whole parish, not the clergy alone, must commit to liturgical skills and spiritual *praxis* according to the best sources available. In the Western Rite that would be : to learn and pray the Psalter (Divine Office) and to learn and pray the Mass (Divine Liturgy).



The Colour Guard above prepare for the Remembrance Day Service on 09 November, Sunday, being closest to the Armistice Day. Our thanks to Deacon Vladimir Christopher McDonald for the many preparations, to James Haskins, Vanessa Mahan, Capt. Andrew Diederich, Martin Long, Pamela Slettum, & Mary Sullivan Coit for participating.

Capt. Andrew Diederich with Tanya and daughter Sarah during his recent return to home and church. Andrew has obtained official permission to offer worship from St. Dunstan's Psalter with his troops -a devotional system not served by the baptist Chaplain.

Dr. Felker and Mrs. Kit Brown at left, Mr. John Eklund and Dottie at lower left who are parents of SubDeacon Theodore. Mrs. Helen Rice below with Matushka Deborah. Helen has lived in an assisted living residence since a hip fracture and back problems. George Rice served for years on the Vestry through all the work of rebuilding the church and reception into Orthodoxy.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL, THE UNTOLD STORY?

CHRISTIAN THEMES IN A CHRISTMAS CLASSIC

by SubDeacon Theodore Eklund

MANY of us will experience at least one version of the Charles Dickens classic, *A Christmas Carol*, either on TV, on the radio or as a stage play. We probably could outline the basic plot from memory. However, these various modern interpretations never seem to touch on one of the important facets of the story.

Why is Scrooge taught his lesson about being a better person at this time of the year? Usually the only answer given is a vague notion that being kind to others is "The Meaning of Christmas." It fits in well with a concept that has become popular in this day and age, that one should be "spiritual", but not "religious."

However, if we look at the actual story as Dickens wrote it, we may be in for a surprise. There is an overriding theme that most of the modern enactments often brush past or completely leave out; that is the role of God, and specifically of Christ in the story.

A Christmas Carol is not written as an overtly Christian story. Dickens was a social commentator, not a theologian. However, underlying Christian themes run throughout the text. Even though the name of Jesus is not referred to directly in the tale, there are a number of clear references to His birth and teachings. In answer to our previous question, Scrooge is taught to be a better person at Christmas because Christmas is a time to remember the birth of the Saviour of mankind. Only through Christ can we hope to escape our own chains.

In Dickens' story, he references the birth of Jesus three times, each time from a different character. The first mention is by Scrooge's nephew, Fred, when he visits Scrooge in his counting house.

"But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time when it has come round - apart from the veneration due its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be set apart from that - as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time...."

The second is from the Ghost of Jacob Marley, as he laments his fate at Scrooge's house.

"At this time of the rolling year, the spectre said, I suffer most. Why did I walk through the crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to

which its light would have conducted me!"

The third reference, though not as specific, at least indicates Christmas started with the birth of Christ. It is voiced by the Ghost of Christmas Present, after Scrooge asks if the Ghost has any brothers. For reference, the story was written in 1843. The Ghost responds, "More than eighteen hundred."

There is, however, more to the story than just acknowledging Christ's birth. There are also references to His life. One example comes when Bob Cratchit is relating to his wife his most recent visit to church with Tiny Tim.

"He told me coming home that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

This is a clear reference to the many miracles Jesus performed throughout His ministry.

Later on, when Scrooge revisits the Cratchit household with the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come, Tiny Tim has died. Scrooge hears Tim's brother, Peter, reading a passage from a book. It clearly relates to Tiny Tim.

"And he took a child and put him in the midst of them:"

Of course, the book from which Peter is reading is the Bible, the verse comes from the Gospel of St Mark. Peter stops reading at that point, but the rest of that verse and the next one would seem to complete the message of Tiny Tim's faith.

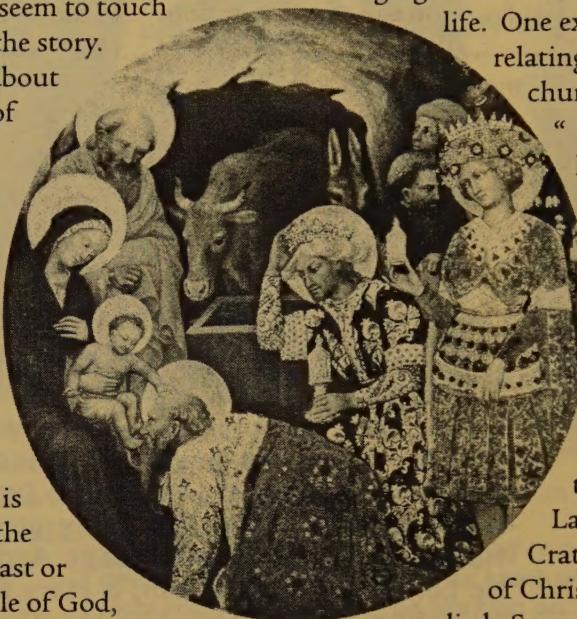
"And when he had taken him into his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me." (Mark 9:36-37)

Dickens' Scrooge confirms this a few pages later by saying -

"Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!"

The story even touches on Christ's death and resurrection. Scrooge is still in the company of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come. They go to a room where there is a dead man covered with a cloth. As Scrooge looks on, he hears the following words,

"Oh cold, cold rigid dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered and honored head, thou canst not



turn one hair to thy dread purpose, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy, and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand was open, generous and true: the heart brave, warm and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal."

This relates to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the head of the Church. His death on the cross brought about victory over Death itself, allowing us the possibility of the everlasting life with which the passage concludes.

The type of language in this passage should also be noted. It is written in a more ancient form of English than the rest of the text. In their recent book, *Neither Archaic Nor Obsolete, the Language of Common Prayer and Public Worship*, Fr. Toon and Fr. Tarsitano call this the "language of prayer." Although, as far as I can tell it was written by Dickens, yet it has the feel of something taken directly out of the Bible or a prayer book specifically because of the language used.

The theme of the story, Scrooge becoming a better person through accepting Christmas (Christ), is well understood in Orthodoxy. At the beginning of the story, Scrooge serves Mammon or riches. Through an interaction with spirits, perhaps an intimation of the Holy Spirit, he has a change of heart or metanoia. His statement "I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year...." is a way of saying he will allow the Holy Spirit into his heart to guide his life. St Gregory of Nyssa said, "The grace of God is not able to visit those who flee salvation. Nor is human virtue of such power as to be adequate of itself to raise up the authentic life of souls who are untouched by grace... But when righteousness of works and the grace of the Spirit come together at the same time in the same soul, together they are able to fill it with blessed life."

In most modern interpretations of this story, much of the text we have mentioned above is left out. In some cases, a speech will be given word for word, except for the portion about Christ. These words have mysteriously vanished, as if they never existed at all. Often, the only Christian references in the story will be specifically in the words of Tiny Tim.

Why has this story been misrepresented as to lose some of its most important features? It is for the same reason the singing of Christmas carols that mention God are banned from public schools and advertising people now only refer to this time as the "holiday" season. It is an attempt to hijack Christmas for the ends of those who have their own agenda.

One obvious factor is the "offense" factor. There is a belief in our modern, secular world that the men-

tion of Christ or God will insult some people, so it must be avoided. Stories with a Christian context must have Christ removed so no one is offended. This allows those who worship other gods, or none at all, to be a part of the festivities of the season without seeing or hearing something they might find unsettling. Unfortunately, what they are being protected from is the truth of Jesus Christ!

For others, Christmas is merely an economic spending period. To them, Christmas is a time for packages, decorations, and food. The positive aspect they see in *A Christmas Carol* is that it encourages giving more presents and having large expensive dinners. The last thing these people would want, is to be reminded at Christmas of Christ himself, who preached the pursuit of the next kingdom instead of the earthly pleasures of this one.

A third reason comes from a slightly different angle. A concept in our society that has been growing recently is the idea that one should be "spiritual" but without having any religious context. Organized religions become more of a shopping market where one can pick out the easy bits they like, without having to make any commitment such as worshiping God. Thus, one can dabble in yoga, the druids, and animal totems, without any regard to where these things came from and what they truly mean. As long as these things make one feel better, that's enough.

A deChristianized Christmas Carol fits well into this idea. Christmas becomes merely a time to be a good person, but not for any particular reason. Scrooge is seen as better only because he serves his fellow man, not because of any old fashioned belief in God. The feel good factor of the story remains, but only in a watered down, sterile way. It is a building without a framework to hold it up.

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is an excellent story with a powerful message. It is a message that should be remembered every Christmas. Modern versions of this story on TV can help put one in the Christmas spirit, and some do a better job at telling the story than others. However, I recommend reading the story every year in a group, from the book, possibly as a new family tradition. That way one can make sure they are getting the full message the story brings. No one should ever forget the real reason of the celebration of Christmas, the Nativity of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. §

MEL GIBSON, FEMINIST

One of the truths in *The Passion of Christ*.

Review by Kathryn Jean Lopez, *National Review Online* Editor

Mel Gibson might be my favorite feminist. If he's not number one on my list, he's pretty close, in competition with Pope John Paul II.

As you probably suspect, I don't have in mind the usual definition of "feminism." I can guarantee you there'll be no fawning Ms. magazine cover story on Gibson (or JPII).

But give me a few minutes to fawn a little.

I, like others, have now seen an in-progress version of Gibson's remarkable film. There is so much to be said and that will be said about the movie. Folks who get turned off by nonsensical talk that it is anti-Semitic will miss an unparalleled movie experience. But what they'll also miss is Mel Gibson, the feminist.

If you want to understand — and celebrate — women, Gibson's *Passion of Christ*, which will be released Ash Wednesday, is a good place to turn. Consider, for example, a scene that has Mary standing on the sidelines after walking a little bit away from the place where her son is being brutally beaten. She's getting beyond the point of being able to take the unbearable pain, but she is slowly gathering her strength, her faith — and is even able to comfort Mary Magdalene, a friend.

Lending a hand of friendship to Christ's mother is a very unlikely sister: Claudia, the wife of Pontius Pilate. Claudia isn't happy with her husband's general situation, and she's not keen on his putting Jesus of Nazareth to death. We know what Pilate chooses in the end, but Claudia does her darnedest to guide him. She is a decent character, who bears her own crosses and evinces nobility throughout. When Mary is at one her hardest moments, it is Claudia who walks over and hands towels to her, which she soon uses to wipe up the precious blood of her son.

Mary feels pain acutely. Mother and son help one another. In another poignant scene, she is starting to lose it again, standing in an alleyway, not knowing if she can do anything for her son. At this point, there's a beautiful flashback to Christ's childhood, in which he falls down and his mother does what is only natural: She runs to him. The movie flashes forward again as Mary does likewise, running to her 33-year-old son. With the gentlest touch, Jesus gives his mother strength, even though he's a bloody mess in indescribable pain—all of which he bears with the kind of grace only divinity can provide.

I don't think many self-described feminists would agree, but there is something unique about women, and Gibson's movie captures it perfectly in Mary, Mary Magdalene, Veronica (who voluntarily wipes Christ's face along his arduous road to Calvary), and Claudia. He shows a real understanding of the depth of women's feeling and the unique role that follows from it: that of giving support and guidance. This understanding of femininity cannot be missed — and should be noted and valued. It's something the likes of a Susan B. Anthony understood, though modern-day feminists would rather we forget it.

This understanding is nothing new to Christians. Christ suffered for the evil in the world so that our souls might be eternally saved. To do that, he needed to live as a man — and he needed a mother, not just as means by which to be born, but also as a loving collaborator in mankind's salvation.

Christian women — especially Catholics — know what pop culture thinks of their role: subservient; unworthy; barefoot

and pregnant; seen but not heard. Consider, in contrast, the words of the current pope: "In transforming culture so that it supports life, women occupy a place, in thought and action, which is unique and decisive. It depends on them to promote a 'new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination,' in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation." Mel Gibson gets that genius.

Archbishop Charles Chaput of the archdiocese of Denver gets it too. After watching *The Passion*, he said, "The reason the secular world hates films like *The Passion of Christ* is because they persuade the heart with the logic of love. The reason the secular world seeks to reinvent or reinterpret Mary is because she's dangerous. She's the model of mature human character — a human being who co-creates a new world not through power, but through unselfish love, faith in God, and the rejection of power." He continued, "The genius of every woman is to love; to protect and nourish the lives entrusted to her; and to support the full development of life in others. It's the same whether you're a mother, or a consecrated religious, or a woman who lives the single vocation." *The Passion* shows this genius in honesty, respect, and admiration.

There are more things going on in *The Passion of Christ* than one can possibly grasp in one viewing—many with the potential for changing one's image of the Gospel, at minimum. It is the sheer un-P.C., frank retelling of a story central to the existence of a majority of the planet—one in which divinely designed women play no small role. No wonder folks have resorted to convenient distractions instead of talking about the actual, multifaceted, countercultural aspects of the movie.

In a day when "Take Your Rosaries Off My Ovaries" is an often-heard chorus in mainstream abortion debates, Mel Gibson's understanding of women and his articulation of their unique mission could have remarkable repercussions. This new—or old, inasmuch as it is natural and commonsensical—kind of feminism, a focus on the different contributions of men and women and the different ways they live their missions, should make us all rethink how we live and love.

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